

*THE AMERICAN FLAG* BY ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK:

A CASE FOR PERFORMANCE

A CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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BY

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## Introduction

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) served as the director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City from 1892 to 1895.<sup>1</sup> During his time in America, the Czech musician composed some of his most famous works including his Symphony No. 9 “From the New World,” the *American String Quartet in F Major*, and the String Quintet in E-flat Major. Though he was reluctant at first to travel to America to take up the position at the Conservatory, Dvořák was pleased with the results of his time there and stated in a letter to his friends in Prague, “I should never have written these works ‘just so’ if I hadn’t seen America.”<sup>2</sup> The piece that is perhaps most connected to Dvořák’s arrival in America is *The American Flag* cantata, which he was commissioned to write by the Conservatory’s founder, Jeannette Meyers Thurber, upon his acceptance of the new position.<sup>3</sup>

When Thurber first founded the National Conservatory of Music of America in 1885, it was called the American School of Opera. Thurber’s original intention was to establish a school to train young musicians to become members of the American Opera Company, an English-language opera house that she founded. When the American Opera Company failed in 1886, the name of the institution was changed at the request of the benefactors, and the focus of the Conservatory became the development of gifted musicians and composers who would help carve out a place for America in the world of classical music.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Shrock, *Choral Repertoire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 488.

<sup>2</sup> Emanuel Rubin, “Dvořák at the National Conservatory,” in *Dvořák in America*, ed. John Tibbetts (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Shrock, 490.

<sup>4</sup> Emanuel Rubin, “Jeannette Meyers Thurber and the National Conservatory of Music,” *American Music*, Vol. 8, no. 3 (Fall 1990), 296.

In order to attract a wealth of talent to the Conservatory, Thurber wanted to find a director with a prestigious reputation. Her first choice was Antonin Dvořák, who was then at the height of his international success. Dvořák had already received the honorary degree of Doctor of Music at the University of Cambridge, where he conducted a very successful performance of his Symphony in G Major and his setting of the *Stabat Mater*.<sup>5</sup> When Dvořák was first offered the position of director in the spring of 1891, he did not accept. Thurber continued to persuade him, and Dvořák eventually signed a two-year contract in the summer of 1891. The contract guaranteed a salary of fifteen-thousand dollars and required him to conduct at least ten concerts of his own compositions.<sup>6</sup>

Dvořák began his responsibilities as director of the Conservatory in 1892. For the occasion, Thurber commissioned a piece from him. The libretto she chose for the piece was *The American Flag*, a patriotic poem written by Joseph Rodman Drake in 1820 that describes the importance of the flag as a symbol during the War of 1812. The premiere of this piece was to take place in a concert scheduled for October 12, 1892. In addition to introducing Dvořák to the American public, this premiere was to be a celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in America.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the libretto did not reach Dvořák until six weeks before he was to depart for America, so he only had time to begin sketching the work. According to notes in a sketchbook labeled "New York 1893/Notes/Jottings," the piece was finally completed on February 17, 1893.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Viktor Fischl, ed., *Antonín Dvořák: His Achievement* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970), 49.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Stefan-Gruenfeldt, *Antonín Dvořák* (New York, NY: Greystone Press, 1941), 187.

<sup>7</sup> Miroslav Ivanov, *In Dvořák's Footsteps* (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1995), 56.

<sup>8</sup> Ivanov, 179.

The performance history of *The American Flag* is brief, and the performances themselves are widely spread out across the past century. The premiere of *The American Flag* was given by the New York Musical Society on May 4<sup>th</sup> of 1895, by which time Dvořák had already left America due to the fact that the Conservatory was experiencing financial hardship and could no longer afford his salary.<sup>9</sup> Dvořák did not demand any sort of performance of the work after he left America, so it became one of only a few pieces he composed that he never heard in performance.<sup>10</sup> The first performance of the piece in Europe took place in Prague on May 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1931, twenty-seven years after the composer's death.<sup>11</sup> In 1976, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas, produced the only recording of the piece currently available.<sup>12</sup> Though the original composition is scored for choir and orchestra, as the centerpiece of this Creative Project, the Ball State University Chamber Choir performed *The American Flag* with piano accompaniment under the direction of the author on September 30, 2014.

Critics of the work suggest that Dvořák felt no particular passion while writing it, which may have contributed to his own lack of enthusiasm for promoting it. Emanuel Rubin called *The American Flag* “an obligatory piece called for in his contract and written with his usual craftsmanship but apparently no special enthusiasm.”<sup>13</sup> Biographer Alec Robertson wrote that, “the composer's apparent lack of regard for this work is probably the best critical verdict

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<sup>9</sup> Shrock, 488.

<sup>10</sup> Hans-Hubert Schönzeler, *Dvořák* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 1984), 151.

<sup>11</sup> “The American Flag,” accessed January 6, 2015, [www.antonin-dvorak.cz/en/american-flag](http://www.antonin-dvorak.cz/en/american-flag).

<sup>12</sup> Antonín Dvořák, *Dvořák : Symphony No. 5/Carnival Overture/The American Flag (Essential Classics)*, Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Michael Tilson Thomas, Joseph Evans and Barry McDaniel, Sony Classical, CD #60297, 1976.

<sup>13</sup> Rubin, “Dvořák at the National Conservatory,” 68.

on it.”<sup>14</sup> If Dvořák had truly had a lack of regard for the piece, he might not have finished it at all. While it is apparent that some of his other pieces that were composed during his time in America have enjoyed a greater prominence in musical history than *The American Flag*, it is speculative to suggest that the composer did not feel strongly about the piece simply because he did not campaign vigorously to have the piece performed.

Authors who address *The American Flag* in books or periodicals written on the subject of Dvořák and his work usually mention it in passing as one of the many pieces he composed during his time in America. Most of the sources that contain any information about the piece give the same background description of how it came to be composed, but do not contain an in-depth analysis or performance history. The lack of available information on the piece has led to a lack of awareness of the piece itself, which has kept the number of performances to a minimum. We may also conjecture that *The American Flag* has not been widely performed because although G. Schirmer published the full orchestral score as well as a vocal score with piano reduction in 1895,<sup>15</sup> the scores have not been made readily available to the public since then.

### **Performance Preparations**

The performance connected to this project was scheduled for September 30, 2014, as part of a graduate conducting recital with the Ball State University Chamber Choir and piano. The rehearsal process took place over the course of six weeks. The Chamber Choir rehearses for one hour each day giving them a total of five hours of rehearsal every week. Of those five

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<sup>14</sup> Alec Robertson, *Dvořák* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1964), 126.

<sup>15</sup> Nick Strimple, “The Choral Works: *Te Deum* and *The American Flag*,” in *Dvořák in America*, ed. John Tibbetts (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993), 194.

hours, approximately one hour each week was devoted to rehearsing *The American Flag*. By the end of the process, the amount of time spent rehearsing the piece totaled about seven hours factoring in the dress rehearsal before the performance.

A simple and effective approach to introducing this piece is by rehearsing those movements that will be the easiest for the choir to master. In several of the movements, there is a soloist who will present a melody, or part of a melody, that is then echoed in some fashion by the choir. The advantage to introducing the piece in this way is that it gives the choir and the soloists an immediate idea of how several of the movements are constructed. If the rehearsals with the choir begin before the soloists are chosen, or the soloists are taken from outside the ensemble and cannot regularly attend rehearsals, the conductor should be prepared to model the solo parts for the choir well enough that it gets a sense of the shared material.

There are several barriers to overcome in preparing this piece with piano accompaniment. The full score is not as readily available as the vocal score, which makes it difficult for the conductor to understand exactly how the orchestration has been reduced into the piano accompaniment. After several rehearsals, I noticed that the pianist was having trouble in certain places. For example, in the second and third movements, both hands of the accompaniment have to switch back and forth between treble and bass clef several times. Because there is an almost constant stream of eighth notes in the accompaniment for these movements, these frequent clef changes prevent the notes from being too far above or below the staff. However, this can be confusing for the pianist because the tempo is marked “allego vivace,” and some of the clef changes also involve a leap of several octaves.

Another difficulty for the pianist is found in the seventh movement. There is a constant run of sixteenth notes that alternates between the right and left hands for the first seventy-two

measures. This is much more demanding for one pianist than it would be for several members of an orchestra. When preparing this piece with piano accompaniment, the conductor should take special care to go through the piece with the accompanist to identify the places that are most difficult to play. That way, if there is anything in the piano part that needs extra rehearsal time or needs to be changed, those things may be dealt with outside of the choral rehearsal to conserve time.

One of the most surprising obstacles for the choir to overcome is the English diction. Though the text is in English, the poem was written in the early nineteenth century, and there are certain words and phrases, such as “to bid its tempest-trumpings loud” from the second movement, that may seem strange to many of the choral singers as well as the soloists. There were also moments in the rehearsal process where the text was difficult to understand, even from the conducting podium. Conductors of American choirs should be aware that, because many of their singers use the English language conversationally, they may be predisposed to assume that if they are singing in English, an English-speaking audience will understand them.

The soloists for our performance were chosen from within the Chamber Choir. The solos in *The American Flag* are difficult enough that they require singers who have at least a few years of singing experience, yet are accessible enough that singers who have not yet had much experience as a featured soloist in a major work would find this a good place to begin. This is helpful to conductors who may not be in a position to hire soloists from outside the ensemble or who have the requisite singers within their own group. When rehearsing with the soloists in the context of the choral rehearsals, the soloists are forced to become much more independent because the solo melodies in this piece are seldom doubled by the accompaniment except when they are repeated by the choir. This independence in the soloists is crucial because

they often have the responsibility of accurately demonstrating what the choir is then expected to repeat.

### Analysis

The method of analysis put forth by Julius Herford and his students is designed to be of particular use to conductors.<sup>16</sup> When applying this method, the conductor studies important aspects of a piece, such as orchestration, dynamics, harmony, changes in tempo, and textual cues, then uses them to construct a chart. These charts help the conductor to determine the form and phrases for each movement as well as identify any important moments that will require particular attention when rehearsing and performing the piece with an ensemble. This method is highly useful because it allows the conductor to take a step back and view an entire movement on a single page. The chart assists in the process of analysis and memorization. A copy of the chart for each movement of *The American Flag* can be found in Appendix A.

To ensure a thorough analysis of the piece, the Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, New Jersey, generously provided the author with a copy of the full score. Since the orchestral score is not available from the original publisher, Westminster Choir College was able to provide a PDF scan of the original conductor's score written in Dvořák's own hand. The piano/vocal score that was published by G. Schirmer in 1895 helped to decipher some of the composer's markings. Table 1 displays the basic structure of the composition.

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<sup>16</sup> Julius Herford, "The Choral Conductor's Preparation of the Musical Score," in *Choral Conducting Symposium*, eds. Harold Decker and Julius Herford (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987), 199-251.



**Table 1.** Movements of *The American Flag*

Movement	Title	Tempo	Time Signature	Key
1	Colors of the Flag	Lento maestoso	12/8	A-flat major
2	First Apostrophe to the Eagle	Allegro vivace	3/4	C minor
3	Second Apostrophe to the Eagle	Allegro vivace	3/4	C minor/C major
4	Interlude	Allegro giusto, alla Marcia	2/4	A major
5	First Apostrophe to the Flag	Un poco meno mosso	2/4	A major
6	Second Apostrophe to the Flag	Un poco meno mosso	2/4	D major
7	Third Apostrophe to the Flag	Allegro – L'istesso tempo	6/8	E-flat major/E minor
8	Finale (Prophetic)	Lento Maestoso	12/8	A major

Throughout *The American Flag*, Dvořák set the patriotic text to maximize dramatic impact by his choice of shifting texture, melodic repetition, key selection, harmonic language, and tempo variation. For example, the first movement is in the key of A-flat major. However, the orchestra enters on an F-minor chord as it presents a motive that is repeated throughout the first movement (see Figure 1). Though the orchestra arrives at the primary key of A-flat major quickly, it repeats the same material at measure nine in A-flat minor. The movement does not officially settle into A-flat major until the entry of the alto solo at measure twenty-three. This use of the relative minor and parallel minor key within the orchestral introduction to the movement adds a fascinating dramatic element to the opening of the piece by making the tonal center somewhat ambiguous until the vocal entrance at measure twenty-three.



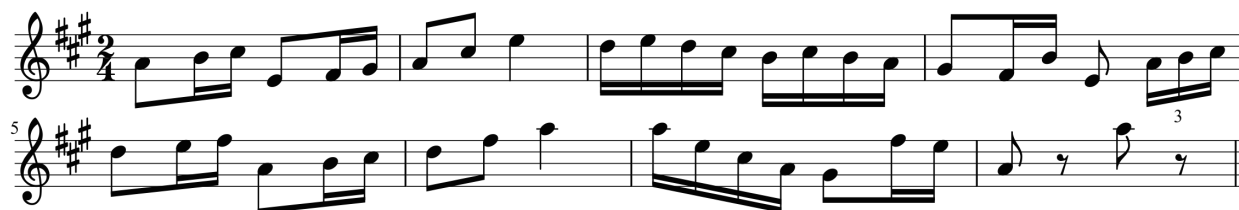
Movement two begins with the bass soloist alone singing the opening text, “majestic monarch of the cloud,” in a declamatory style unsupported by the orchestra. The soloist therefore has the responsibility of establishing the key before the orchestra enters in to reinforce it. Most of this second movement can be divided into parallel sections of sixteen measures each, in which the melody of the soloist is repeated and harmonized by the choir. It is not until measure sixty-three that the soloist and the choir perform at the same time. The expanded texture in this closing section enhances the drama of the repeated text and signifies that the movement is drawing to a close.

The third movement is an almost identical restatement of the second movement with different text. What makes the third movement unique is that the final section, beginning at measure sixty-three, shifts to C major whereas the second movement remains in C minor through the entire movement. Because this final section contains the repeated text “harbingers of victory,” the change of key to the parallel major more accurately reflects the triumphant mood of the text.

Movement four is the only movement of the piece that is purely instrumental. It is appropriate that this movement is written as a march because the subtitles of the three movements that follow show the American flag as a symbol from the perspective of three varied servicemen: the Foot-Soldier, the Cavalryman, and the Sailor. The primary theme of this movement (see Figure 3) is stated three times in the flute, first clarinet, and first violin parts. For the first two statements of the theme, the violins and first clarinets only play the first four measures while the flutes complete it. It is not until the third statement, at measures sixty-one to sixty-eight, that the theme is played in full by these three instruments as well as in both oboe

parts. This orchestration corresponds with the dynamic peak of the movement, where the orchestra is marked fortissimo. Even in an instrumental movement, the composer uses the same techniques found in the choral movements to enhance the drama of the piece.

Figure 3, Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, “Interlude,” mm. 17-24 (orchestral theme)



The closing section of the interlude changes suddenly from A major to A minor. This change of mode to the parallel minor adds variety to the transition between the fourth and fifth movements, which are both in the same key. The composer introduces a new motive in the closing section (see Figure 4). This motive, found mainly in the first and second oboe parts, is overall simpler than the initial orchestral theme of the Interlude and helps to bring the movement to a gentle conclusion, thus setting up the soft dynamic level at the beginning of movement five.

Figure 4, Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, “Interlude,” mm. 69-72 (orchestral motive)



Dvořák created the drama in the fifth movement through the use of tempo variation. Most of the ritards in this movement add emphasis to cadential moments. For example, the first

ritard comes at measure forty-four as the soloist is reaching the end of his phrase and the choir is preparing to enter. The effect created is that the peak of the ritard comes on the dominant chord of measure forty-six (see Figure 5), and the choir resumes at the initial tempo of the movement on the tonic in measure forty-seven where it once again repeats thematic material provided by the soloist.

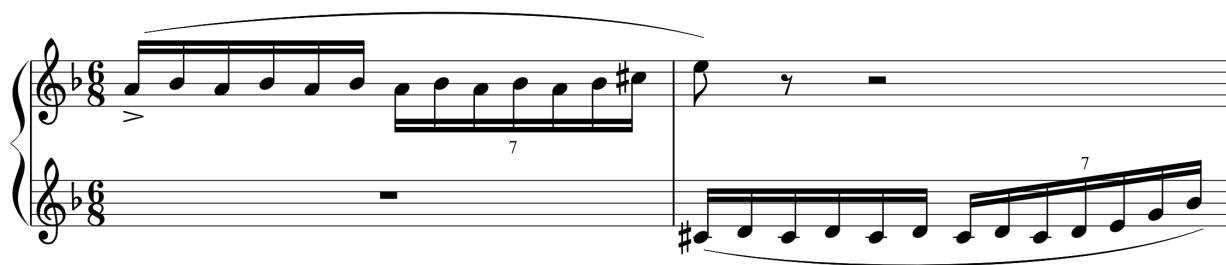
Figure 5, Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, “First Apostrophe to the Flag,” mm. 44-47

The musical score for measures 44-47 of "First Apostrophe to the Flag" by Antonín Dvořák is presented in three staves. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 2/4. The Tenor Solo part starts in measure 44 with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a ritardando (*rit.*) marking. The lyrics are "war and ven geance from the glance." The Soprano/Alto and Tenor/Bass parts enter in measure 46 with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and a return to tempo (*a tempo*) marking. Their lyrics are "Each sol - dier".

Movement six can be divided into two larger sections of almost equal length with a brief instrumental conclusion at the end. In the first of the two larger sections, the tenors and basses of the choir give a strict repetition of the solo line at the same octave with no harmony, giving greater prominence to the brisk, energetic rhythm of the solo line. The second section modulates from D major to D minor, and this time the sopranos repeat the solo line with the altos singing in parallel thirds. The text in the first section focuses on the glory and the thrill of battle, while the text of the second section describes the feeling of destroying one's enemy. Because these are two separate, yet strikingly similar ideas, Dvořák's choice of keys dramatizes the text.

The sixth movement concludes with a restatement of its opening theme. This restatement is cut short after seven measures and followed by two measures of silence. To the listener, it sounds strange at first that the orchestra would abandon the melody without resolving it. However, the measures of silence create a sense of anticipation that is followed by a highly energetic ostinato in the introduction to movement seven (see Figure 6). The ostinato begins in the string section, expands to include clarinets and flutes and then climaxes when the choral tenors enter at measure eleven. The rippling effect of this ostinato puts the listener in mind of the crashing of ocean waves, which is an excellent illustration of the upcoming text since the entire first section of this movement refers to the “Flag of the seas on ocean waves.”

Figure 6, Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, “Third Apostrophe to the Flag,” mm. 1-2



In most of the movements of this piece, the exchange of melodic material is between the soloist and the choir. Movement seven does contain a similar exchange of material, but in a slightly different way. From measures eleven to fifty-three, the tenor section sings first and is echoed by the other sections of the choir. As this exchange continues through measure seventy-three, the harmonic progression becomes increasingly more complex as it moves through diminished chords built on D-natural, F-sharp, and C-sharp to emphasize the heightened drama of the text “when Death, careening on the gale, sweeps darkly round the bellied sail.” After the

choral climax at measure seventy-three, the choir is marked subito pianissimo and all sing an E-natural to introduce the new key of E minor. From here, the bass soloist and the choral sopranos and altos gently bring the movement to a quiet close in A major, the key of the final movement.

Movement eight begins with a repeat of the alto solo theme from the first movement. After this brief introduction, the bass soloist and the orchestra go through several brief harmonic progressions until the choral entrance at measure eighteen, which lands in the key of F major. It is not until measure twenty-four that the movement returns to the home key of A major. Instead of using the parallel or relative minor to transition back into the home key, as is the case in many of the other movements, Dvořák uses a brief D-minor chord to change keys. This transition is somewhat abrupt, yet it makes sense that the composer would choose to return to A major at measure twenty-four because the first chord of the measure occurs on the word “proud.” The texture of the choir is entirely homophonic throughout the movement. Because this final movement is so brief, keeping the texture of the choir simple makes it easier to highlight the expansive harmonic language created by the orchestra.

The text of *The American Flag* describes the importance of the flag as a symbol from several different points of view. Throughout the movements of the cantata, Dvořák uses all of the musical elements at his disposal to illustrate the drama of the text. Many of these movements, such as the first and sixth movements, utilize parallel or relative relationships between keys to represent a change in mood. Other movements, such as the fifth movement, utilize variance of tempo to emphasize textual meaning and enhance the impact of the orchestration. In the second and seventh movements, the dramatic peak of the text is marked by an expanse of texture. The melodic repetition that exists in almost every choral movement is

varied so that it remains constant but not stagnant. All of these elements are combined to create a piece that is cohesive and that accurately portrays the narrative of the poetry.

### **Performance Considerations**

One of the earliest decisions the conductor must make regarding the performance is the selection of soloists. The first solo indicated in the score is an alto solo at the beginning of the first movement. However, the score suggests that the alto solo may be sung by a small group of altos. If the conductor prefers the sound of more than one voice singing the solo line, they might take this opportunity and assign the alto solo to the first altos. Though the alto solo is not complicated, this presents the challenge of blending multiple voices singing a single line in unison. However, it may be easier to balance an orchestra with several singers.

A majority of the solos throughout *The American Flag* are scored for a bass, including both the first and second “Apostrophe to the Eagle,” the second and third “Apostrophe to the Flag,” and the “Finale.” Future conductors of this piece may choose to assign the bass solos to multiple singers. In the case of our performance, the bass solos were divided between two singers. The first performed both of the “Apostrophes to the Eagle” and the “Finale,” while the second performed the “Second” and “Third Apostrophe to the Flag.” These pairings of solos were chosen because both “Apostrophes to the Eagle” and the “Finale” present a slightly higher range, and they give both bass soloists an almost equal amount of solo repertoire.

The tenor solo in the “First Apostrophe to the Flag” presents many challenges. It begins on an A-natural above the treble staff, which is high in the range of most tenors. So, the soloist must come in at the top of their range without being overpowering. Additionally, the “First Apostrophe to the Flag” has several changes in tempo that are fairly close together, so the



soloist and the conductor must be able to communicate with one another particularly well to ensure that the soloist is neither ahead of nor behind the choir. Conductors must consider the demands of this role against the available singers before programming *The American Flag*.

In the event that the conductor assigns the alto solo of the “Colors of the Flag” to the first altos, some re-voicing of the first choral appearance may become necessary. The alto part and the first tenor part from measures forty-five to fifty-two are an identical restatement of the material presented by the alto solo part in the first phrase. In an ensemble with few tenors, it may be advised to ask all of the tenors to sing the second tenor part while the second altos sing the alto choral part as written, giving them the melody.

### **Challenges for the Conductor**

For the conductor who is programming *The American Flag*, there are many challenges. Apart from the choices that the conductor must make concerning the preparation of the score and the selection of the soloists, there are many challenges involved in the actual conducting of the piece. For example, the “Apostrophes to the Eagle” each begin with a soloist singing a cappella, soloists may require freedom of tempo to navigate these opening sections. However, the conductor will need to firmly control the tempo starting at measure five. That effort is complicated by a fermata in measure sixteen of the “First Apostrophe to the Eagle,” which occurs on the beat immediately before the soloist’s re-entry. The conductor must therefore be careful not to hold the fermata too long and give a clear pick-up gesture that is in tempo for the soloist.

Each “Apostrophe to the Eagle” requires sensitivity to tempo. The composer’s marking of *allegro vivace* suggests conducting one beat for each measure. However, the choir found

that the tempo was too fast to make the text intelligible. For example, the tenors and basses enter on an eighth note in measure twenty-five. In order to make the text expression clear, a slower tempo requires conducting a “slip three” pattern and great discipline on the part of the ensemble to maintain a bright forward-moving pace without slowing to andante.

In terms of content and structure, the two “Apostrophes to the Eagle” are almost completely identical, with the exception that the second one ends in C major rather than C minor. The last two measures of the “Second Apostrophe to the Eagle” are made up of groups of five notes to a measure (see Figure 7). These quintuplets can be difficult to execute, particularly because these quintuplets occur not only at the end of one movement, but at the transition point between two movements, the conductor should give each of the five beats for both measures. This also helps with the introduction of the “Interlude,” the movement that follows, since by that time the conductor returns to conducting each beat of the measure rather than just the downbeat of each measure.

Figure 7, Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, “Second Apostrophe to the Eagle,” mm. 87-88



When a performance of *The American Flag* is being done with piano instead of orchestra, the “Interlude” loses some of its grandeur without the different timbres of the different instruments one might find in an orchestra. However, any performance of the piece,

especially a piece that is so rarely programmed, would be incomplete without it. A possible compromise would be to include the Interlude, but to cut measures thirty-seven to ninety-two. This reduces the length of the movement by more than half and still gives the audience enough material that it gets the spirit of the movement. The pianist and the conductor would be able to do much of the work on the Interlude together outside of the choral rehearsals, thus allowing the choir more time to work on the movements where they sing.

The greatest challenge in the “First Apostrophe to the Flag” from a conducting point of view is the fluctuation of tempos. The conductor may experience a tendency to hold the end of the ritards too long so that they became like fermatas. For example, the choral entrance in this movement occurs at the end of a ritard on the pick-up to a measure that is “a tempo.” The solution for giving a clear cue for the choral entrance is to subdivide the second beat of the measure where the choir sings its pick-up notes because the tenors and basses come in right on the second beat and the sopranos and altos begin on the “and” of the second beat.

The “Second Apostrophe to the Flag” should be one of the first movements that the choir learns. In terms of melodic material, it is the easiest to master. In the first half of the movement, the bass soloist presents a melody that is then repeated by the tenors and basses in unison. Similar to the alto solo part in the first movement, the challenge is having to blend the sound of several voices all singing the same material. Unlike the first movement however, the challenge is elevated by the need to blend the voices of two very different sections. The bass section has a sound that is darker overall, whereas the tenor section has a much brighter sound.

The tenor section is most prominent in the beginning of the “Third Apostrophe to the Flag.” However, in the familiar case of a choir with few tenors, the conductor could ask a few of the second altos to sing the tenor part up to the point where the soloist enters. The range for

the tenor part in this movement is placed comfortably for them to sing and the tenors and basses do not sing for the rest of the movement from the point where the bass soloist enters.

In the second half of the “Third Apostrophe to the Flag,” the sopranos and altos do not strictly imitate the soloist, as is the case in many of the movements of the piece. The rhythmic patterns of the sopranos and altos are identical to the soloist, but the melody of the soloist is not repeated. Similar to the previous movement, the cut-offs for the sopranos and altos need to be precise because of the tendency for the ends of smaller phrases to occur in places where the last pitch is tied over to a quarter note or eighth note.

In the second half of the “Third Apostrophe to the Flag,” there is an issue with the piano accompaniment in the vocal score. From measures seventy-six to eighty-seven and then from measures eighty-eight to ninety-four, chords are indicated in the left hand of the accompaniment that fade too quickly if they are played as written on the piano. In performance, pianists should consider rearticulating the chords so that the instrumental part is not lost. These chords would not need to be separated in such a manner with orchestra since they would be played by multiple instrumentalists who could stagger their breathing or their bowing.

The Finale presents the widest range of dynamic contrast by containing both the softest and loudest dynamic levels of the entire piece. The orchestra begins at triple piano, and by measure twenty-six, the choir is singing quadruple forte. At such a high dynamic level, the choir members are likely to experience a tendency to force their voices, so that by the end of the movement the singers will be vocally exhausted. The conductor should therefore instruct the choir to think of the dynamics in the score as an indication of intensity rather than simply a difference in volume. The conductor also needs to be careful about the size of their gestures so

that they are showing the choir intensity without necessarily making the gestures too big, while at the same time making sure that the sizes of their gestures are still proportionate to the increase in dynamics.

### **Conclusion**

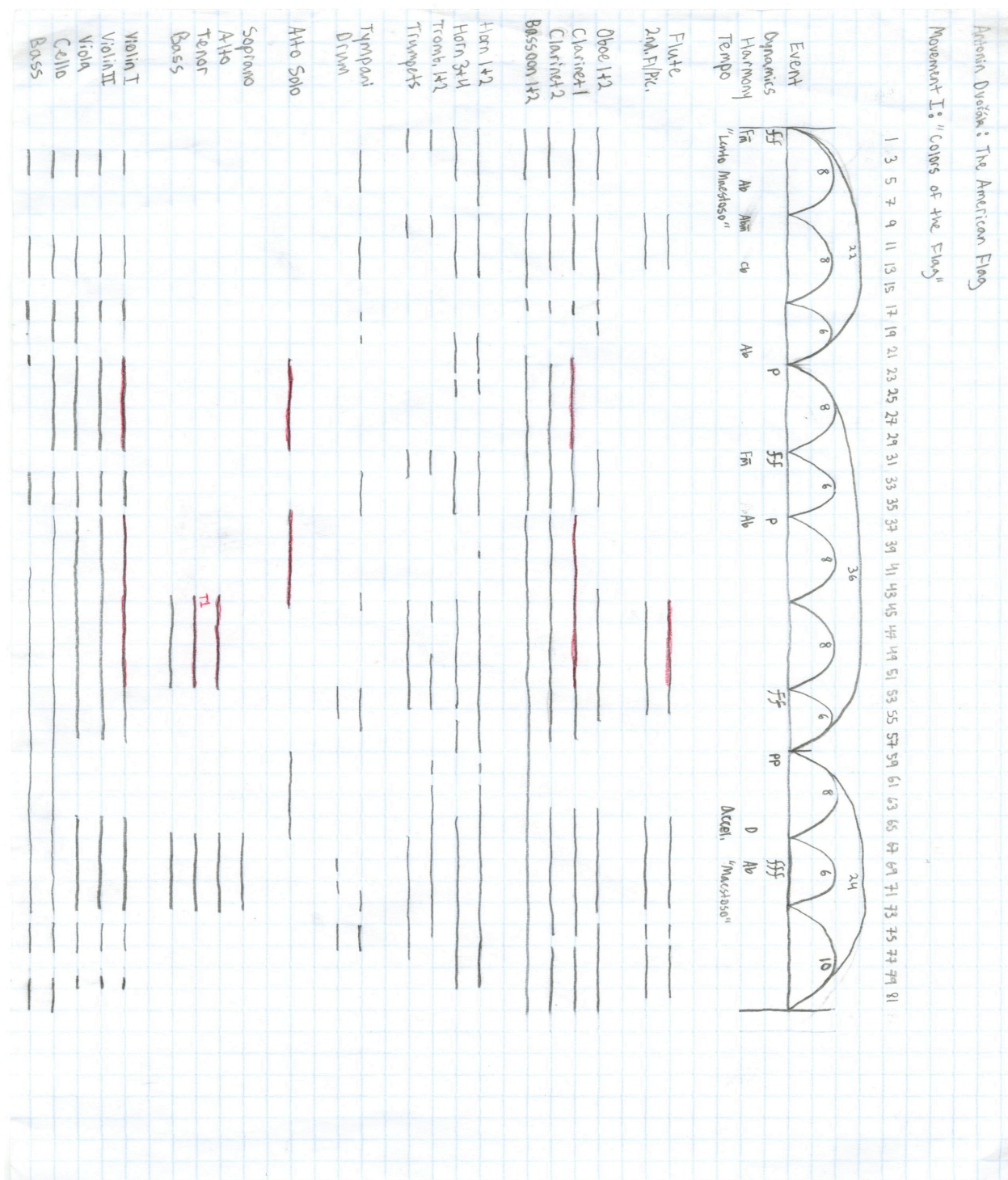
Despite the assumptions of some that Dvořák may not have cared much for the piece, the fascinating creation story of *The American Flag* and its dramatic content deserve to be shared in live performances. The piece is appropriate for most college choirs and community choirs and would be an excellent introduction to multi-movement works for ensembles that may not have many opportunities to perform them. Even some high-school choirs could perform it convincingly, perhaps in a festival setting. Among its modest challenges are: frequent use of compound meter, short passages with moderately complex rhythmic variations, brief instances of difficult ranges (such as the first tenor part from the “Colors of the Flag”) quick delivery of antiquated English text, and colorful use of harmonic language.

*The American Flag* could be programmed in concerts that are on or near important American holidays, such as the Fourth of July, Flag Day, or Veterans Day. It would also be appropriate for concerts near Columbus Day because the original premiere date was intended as part of a concert celebrating the four-hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s arrival in America. The piece would pair nicely with arrangements of some of the more familiar patriotic hymns or American folk songs that are regularly performed on these occasions. The piece also provides an alternate perspective because the text, which celebrates a symbol of America, was set to music by a famous musical visitor.

Ideally, *The American Flag* could someday be performed once again with an orchestra, as it was originally meant to be. The recording of *The American Flag* by the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra is evidence that, at some point in the last few decades, the instrumental parts and a copy of the full orchestral score existed; perhaps they still exist. If they have been lost or destroyed for some reason, there is still the possibility that a new edition may be made from the original director's score kept by the Westminster Choir College Library. Perhaps if this could be accomplished, *The American Flag* might be brought out of obscurity and into a more prominent place amongst Dvořák's body of choral-orchestral repertoire.

# APPENDIX A – FORM AND ANALYSIS CHARTS

Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, Movement 1: "Colors of the Flag"





Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, Movement 2: "First Apostrophe to the Eagle"

Antonín Dvořák: *The American Flag*  
 Movement II: "First Apostrophe to the Eagle"

1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 21 23 25 27 29 31 33 35 37 39 41 43 45 47 49 51 53 55 57 59 61 63 65 67 69 71 73 75 77 79 81 93 95 97

Event  
 Dynamics  
 Text

Flute  
 2nd Fl./Pic.

Oboe 1+2  
 Clarinet 1  
 Clarinet 2  
 Bassoon 1+2

Horn 1+2  
 Horn 3+4  
 Tromb. 1+2  
 Trumpets

Tympani  
 Drum

Bass Solo

Soprano  
 Alto  
 Tenor  
 Bass

Violin I  
 Violin II  
 Viola  
 Cello  
 Double Bass  
 Harp

"Majestic Monarch"  
 "Majestic Monarch"  
 "Lead the troops!"  
 "Singles the monarch"  
 "Hundredth of heaven!"

ff  
 f  
 p  
 f  
 ff  
 p  
 pp

4  
 16  
 12  
 8  
 16  
 8  
 8  
 16  
 8  
 8  
 12  
 24  
 12

(f)  
 (f)  
 (f)  
 (f)  
 (f)



Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, Movement 3: "Second Apostrophe to the Eagle"

Antonín Dvořák: *The American Flag*  
 Movement III: "Second Apostrophe to the Eagle"

Event  
 Dynamics  
 Text  
 Harmony

1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 21 23 25 27 29 31 33 35 37 39 41 43 45 47 49 51 53 55 57 59 61 63 65 67 69 71 73 75 77 79 81 83 85 84

4 16 12 8 16 8 8 16 8 8 16 8 8 12 24 12

"Chalk of the Sun" "Chalk of the Sun" "Horn in the Saphire Smoke" "bird its bleeding" "Hawking of Victory"

f sf p pp f f p sf

Flute  
 2nd Fl/Pic

Oboe 1+2

Clarinet 1

Clarinet 2

Bassoon 1+2

Horn 1+2

Horn 3+4

Tromb. 1+2

Trumpets

Tympani

Drum

Bass Solo

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Bass

Harp



Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, Movement 4: "Interlude"

Antonín Dvořák: *The American Flag*  
Movement II: Interlude

1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 21 23 25 27 29 31 33 35 37 39 41 43 45 47 49 51 53 55 57 59 61 63 65 67 69 71 73 75 77 79 81 83 85 87 89 91 93 95 97 99 101

Event  
Dynamics  
Harmony

ff f A f mf F# A f pp pp f p pp

8 16 8 8 20 8 24 32 8 34 16 34 18 10

Flute  
2nd Fl./Pic.

Oboe 1+2  
Clarinet 1  
Clarinet 2  
Bassoon 1+2

Horn 1+2  
Horn 3+4  
Trumpet 1+2  
Trumpets

Drum  
Triangle

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Bass

gym.



Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, Movement 5: "First Apostrophe to the Flag"

Antonín Dvořák: *The American Flag*

Movement V: "First Apostrophe to the Flag (The Fort Soldier)"

1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 21 23 25 27 29 31 33 35 37 39 41 43 45 47 49 51 53 55 57 59 61 63 65 67 69 71 73 75 77 79 81 83 85 87 89

Event  
Dynamics  
Tempo  
Text

Flute  
2nd Fl./Pic.

Oboe 1+2  
Clarinet 1  
Clarinet 2  
Bassoon 1+2  
Horn 1+2  
Horn 3+4  
Trumpets 1+2  
Sax.  
Drum  
Tenor Solo

Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Double Bass

pp "Un poco meno mosso"  
"Flag of the Brave!"  
p  
31  
17  
15  
sf "Brave Soldier Cry"  
rit. "Allegro"  
38  
15  
8  
rit. "Allegro"  
8  
rit. "Allegro" rit. "Allegro"  
21  
13  
"Flag of the Brave" "Sign of hope"

(f)

Antonín Dvořák: The American Flag

Movement III: "Second Apostrophe to the Flag (The Cavalryman)"

1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 17 19 21 23 25 27 29 31 33 35 37 39 41 43 45 47 49 51 53 55 57 59 61 63 65 67 69 71 73 75 77 79 81 83 85 87 89 91 93 95 97

Event  
Dynamics  
Text  
Harmony

mf  
"Cannon-musings, loud"  
0

pp  
"Victor-Glaucus grow"  
Dm

pp  
0

Flute  
2nd Fl./Pic.

Oboe 1+2  
Clarinet 1  
Clarinet 2  
Bassoon 1+2

Horn 1+2  
Horn 3+4  
Trumpet 1+2  
Trumpets

Bass Solo

Soprano  
Alto  
Tenor  
Bass

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Double Bass



Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, Movement 7: "Third Apostrophe to the Flag"

Antonín Dvořák: *The American Flag*  
 Movement VII: "Third Apostrophe to the Flag (The Sailor)"

1 4 7 10 13 16 19 22 25 28 31 34 37 40 43 46 49 52 55 58 61 64 67 70 73 76 79 82 85 88 91 94 97 100 103 106 109 112 115

Event  
 Dynamics  
 Harmony  
 Text

Flute  
 2nd Fl./Pic.

Oboe 1 & 2  
 Clarinet 1  
 Clarinet 2  
 Bassoon 1 & 2

Horn 1 & 2  
 Horn 3 & 4  
 Trombone 1 & 2  
 Trumpets

Tympani  
 Drum

Bass Solo

Soprano  
 Alto  
 Tenor  
 Bass

Violin I  
 Violin II  
 Viola  
 Cello  
 Double Bass

pp 10 35 16 43 11 16 35 16 25 9 19 37 18 A

ff  
 "Flag of the Seas"

ff  
 "Death"

p  
 "Dying Wail"

ff  
 "Smile"

(pp)  
 (p)  
 (m)

Antonín Dvořák, *The American Flag*, Movement 8: "Finale (Prophetic)"

Antonín Dvořák: *The American Flag*  
 Movement VIII: "Finale (Prophetic)"

Event  
 Dynamics  
 Harmony  
 Text

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36

9 22 6 8 5

A pp B pp C# "Flag of the Free!" E F sf "All Hymns!" A ff "Rough Stars" D ff A

Flute  
 2nd Fl./Pic.  
 Oboe 1+2  
 Clarinet 1  
 Clarinet 2  
 Bassoon 1+2  
 Horn 1+2  
 Horn 3+4  
 Trombone 1+2  
 Trumpets  
 Drum  
 Bass Solo  
 Soprano  
 Alto  
 Tenor  
 Bass  
 Violin I  
 Violin II  
 Viola  
 Cello  
 Double Bass



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